



# MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC # 064-2011

## LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Matti Herrera Bower and Members of the City Commission

FROM: *Hilda M. Fernandez*  
Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: March 16, 2011

SUBJECT: Live oak trees on Alton Road south of Fifth Street

This Letter to Commission is provided to inform you of the circumstances surrounding the recent removal of live oak trees in the east swale area of Alton Road, between Commerce Court and Fourth Streets.

As part of the South Pointe Neighborhood III, IV, V Project, Alton Road was widened to accommodate northbound and southbound bike lanes, among other improvements. The widening of Alton Road necessitated the cutting of tree roots on the street side of the east swale, bringing the road closer to the base of the existing tree trunks. These existing tree root systems were already compromised and restricted because of the existing narrow swale. The loss of the roots on the street side, coupled with structural defects in some cases, greatly increased the likelihood that the live oak trees would become destabilized and susceptible to failure with increased wind. Additionally, retaining the existing trees near the edge of the roadway would make them more likely to be hit or have branches ripped off by large vehicles, as they have been in the past.

Representatives from the CIP Department, Park's Greenspace Management Division (including the City's Urban Forrester), and the Contractor met on site to discuss and evaluate the existing condition of the trees. During the 2005 hurricane season, several of the live oak trees along the Alton Road swale blew over due to the existing narrow rooting space. Over time, a number of these trees have been hit and scarred by large vehicles; these large wounds at the base of trees frequently get infected by fungi which progressively decay and weaken the tree's trunk and roots, often resulting in failure of the tree at a future date. The original oaks were of a good size and contributed to the neighborhood's attractiveness. However, they had a number of structural defects and circling roots that would likely have failed.

The group agreed that the stability of these trees was compromised and their future viability uncertain. While our preference is always to save our existing trees, it was collectively agreed that the trees be removed and replaced. The removal of these trees is allowed by DERM under the tree permit, which requires the replacement of the canopy lost or removed. It has been recommended that the trees be replaced with live oaks. The replacement live oak trees will be properly positioned in the swale and will have root systems that are capable of fully exploiting the increased rooting space. These trees will be large enough to make an immediate impact, but not so large that they will require an extensive period of time to get established. In the long term the neighborhood will have better quality, better positioned, and better rooted trees.

As always, please feel free to call me should you have any questions on this matter.

c: Hilda M. Fernandez, Assistant City Manager  
Kevin Smith, Parks and Recreation Director  
John Oldenburg, Parks and Recreation Assistant Director  
Christopher Latt, PhD, Parks Superintendent Urban Forrester  
Fernando Vazquez, P.E., City Engineer  
Chuck Fossler, Sr. Capital Projects Coordinator  
Carla Dixon, Capital Projects Coordinator